THE

WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST DURING HIS PASSION

F. X. SCHOUPPE, S. J.

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THE

Words of Jesus Christ

DURING HIS PASSION,

Explained in their Literal and Moral Sense.

Translated from the French

OF

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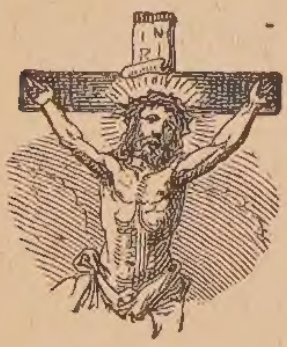

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✠ MICHAEL AUGUSTINE,
Archbishop of New York.

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THE

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DURING HIS PASSION.

INTRODUCTION.

GREAT as the wonder is that a God should come into this world and dwell among men, a still greater wonder is to see this God reduced to the condition of a criminal, poor and helpless, given over to the power of most wicked men. Such a mystery would have never entered our thoughts, unless revelation had told us of it. Now this mystery is a great reality, a fact which was accomplished in the person of the true Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has seen this man, in His Passion, delivered into the hands of Jews and pagans, placed in contact with sinners and wicked men. What

a situation! and what will be the conduct of the Eternal Wisdom? How will He triumph over human passions in league with the powers of hell? The evangelists tell us in the history of the Passion and death of Jesus. This admirable recital shows us the Man-God just as the prophets had described Him: as a lamb, who, abandoned to the rapacity of wolves, triumphs over His enemies by yielding to their ferocity.

What makes this mysterious drama show forth the wisdom and sanctity of Christ are the words which He uttered during His Passion.

Quite different from ordinary criminals, who think only of escaping justice, Jesus says nothing, does nothing, for His deliverance: He seems rather to try not to hinder His enemies in the execution of their Deicide designs. All His words, though uttered in the presence of an enraged populace, breathe a divine calm. They are simple, and contain no bitterness toward His enemies, but are always

victorious by the force of truth and justice. They are not dictated by passion; they are inspired by pure wisdom, pure truth, pure love for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. "The beginning of Thy words is truth" (Ps. cxviii. 160). The Saviour speaks little during His passion: often He preserves a silence which is no less admirable than His words. All that He says is suited to the persons He addresses, to the disposition of their souls, to their needs and to their capacities. He does not speak merely to His interrogators; in their person He instructs the whole world, He exhorts all men. His words are spirit and life, words of eternal life (John vi. 64, 69). But to discern the treasures of life contained in them it is necessary to consider them in the light of faith, and to meditate on them with religious attention.

Let us follow the order of the different scenes of the Passion from the Garden of Olives to Calvary; let us listen to the words which the Man-God utters, first in

the Garden: then at the house of Caiphas; thirdly, before Pilate; fourthly, on the way to Calvary; fifthly, we will endeavor to interpret His mysterious silence at the court of Herod; and we will conclude by the meditation on the seven last words on the cross.

I. The Garden of Olives.

In the Garden of Olives the Saviour speaks to His heavenly Father in prayer. He addresses His disciples, then Judas, Peter, the soldiers who come to arrest Him, and finally the chief priests.

1st. He addresses His Eternal Father. Stretched on the ground, He prays to Him, saying: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39). In this prayer, full of filial confidence, the Saviour makes known to His heavenly Father His interior repugnance; then He begs a favor, which is properly the object of His prayer. In saying "Let this chalice pass; remove from Me, spare Me, this sorrowful Passion," it is not a demand which He addresses to His Father, but a manner of speaking, to show the sentiments of dislike and repugnance His human nature

experiences. "My Father," He says, "My human nature so dreads this Passion, that it prays Thee to use Thy all-powerful aid to remove it."

The interior struggles of the Saviour were so violent that a bloody sweat came forth from His adorable body. In placing before our eyes this terrible inward conflict, He wishes to encourage us to fight our own battles. Whenever we feel similar suffering, when we have crosses and trials and temptations, we can imitate the Saviour and cry to our heavenly Father. "Nevertheless," He adds, "not as I will, but as Thou wilt." This is, properly speaking, His prayer. He prays not to have regard to His dislike and to sweeten the bitterness of His chalice, but to accomplish in Him His holy will. Learn from this that the foundation of all our prayers should be the accomplishment of the will of God, or, as St. Ignatius says, "to know and accomplish more perfectly the will of God."

The prayer of Jesus is a model prayer

for us in moments of trial, affliction, sorrow, and sickness. In praying thus He teaches us to conquer the weaknesses of our nature, to be submissive to the will of God, and to pray in all our troubles and temptations.

2d. Speaking to His disciples, the Saviour says: "Sit you here till I go yonder and pray. My soul is sorrowful even unto death: stay you here and watch with Me. Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. xxvi. 36, 38, 41). After finding them asleep, He said: "What, could you not watch one hour with Me?" These words of Jesus serve to instruct them, and to edify them by His example.

First. He gives them a double example: an example of prayer in critical moments; an example of a holy sadness which they should have for their past sins. My soul is sorrowful unto death, my soul is sorrowful unto death, especially for the sins of the world.

Second. The instruction He gives them and His repeated warnings are intended to guard them against future sins. "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." Watch and pray for fear of yielding to temptation, for if the spirit is willing human nature is very weak; it has need to be sustained by the grace of God, which is obtained by prayer. By these words He gives us to understand that to avoid sin two things are necessary: prayer, which includes also the use of the sacraments, in order to obtain help from God; and vigilance, which supposes not only watchfulness over our senses and our hearts, but also the flight from the occasions of sin and faithfulness in the service of God. This vigilance may be well practised in a daily examination of conscience.

In saying "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," Jesus gives us also another lesson. He reveals to us the sadness of His soul, in order to teach us that holy

sadness which we should cherish, and make us avoid that unchristian sadness which, as the Apostle says, "worketh death" (II. Cor. vii. 10).

Unchristian sadness is that discouragement, that bitterness of feeling, which sickness and other troubles cause. Such was not the sadness of the Saviour. He rejoiced to suffer death for us.

Good and holy sadness has for its motive real evils, the sad state of souls, the outrages committed against God, and the damnation which is the terrible consequence. These are the evils which the Saviour laments, and which we should lament with Him. It is of this sadness that He says: "Blessed are ye that weep" (Matt. v. 5).

3d. The Saviour speaks to Judas. When this wretch came to give Him the traitorous kiss Jesus did not repulse him, He did not make bitter reproaches, but said to him in all meekness: "Friend, dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke xxii. 48.)

In speaking thus to Judas, in showing him his baseness, He made a last attempt to convert this unworthy disciple. First, He speaks to touch his heart. "My friend," said He. In giving him the sweet name of friend he recalled all His kindness towards him, as if He would say: "My dear disciple, what have I done to be thus betrayed by you? I have chosen you as one of My apostles, I instructed you, I destined you for the greatest glory, I fed you with My Flesh and Blood: is it for this that you have delivered Me over to the Jews?" Second, He shows him also the atrocity of his crime, and gives him an opportunity to see its consequences. "Judas, by this kiss you betray the Son of man." He does not say, "You betray Me, your Master," but "You betray the Son of man." As if He said to him, "Do you not know that He whom you betray is that Son of Man whose divinity St. Peter confessed in your presence? Do you not remember that this Son of man is also the Son of God? Do

you not fear to provoke His anger, and undergo His fearful judgments?

May not these words be applied to the imitators of Judas? Now who are these imitators? First, they are the unfaithful and ungrateful disciples of Jesus Christ; that is to say, Christians who violate their baptismal promises, and are ungrateful for the benefits they have received from Jesus Christ. My friend, He can say to them, what evil have I done to you, that you should turn against Me? Is it because I have created you, redeemed you, sanctified you by baptism? Second, the imitators of Judas are the disciples who deliver Jesus into the hands of His enemies; now such in particular are those who communicate unworthily.

4th. Jesus speaks to St. Peter. This apostle, full of love for his Master, and wishing to defend Him, drew his sword, and striking at random, cut off the ear of Malchus. Jesus, who had already shown His power in making His enemies fall to the ground by a simple word, forbade

Peter to resist, and said to him: "Put up again thy sword into its place, for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of angels. How, then, shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that so it must be done? The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Matt. xxvi. 52–54; John xviii. 11.)

Jesus forbids Peter to offer resistance for two reasons. First, it is not lawful for a private individual to shed blood. And again, Jesus did not wish to be defended. He accepts His sufferings in submission to His Father's will, and gives Himself up to His enemies; He is resolved not to escape, even though He could do so lawfully.

"Those who take the sword," says He, "will perish with the sword." It is a crime deserving of death to shed another's blood without lawful authority, and this crime will be punished in this world, at

least generally, but always in the other world. Peter might have said that he was merely defending his Master against unjust aggressors. This is not a reasonable defence, Jesus would answer. One alone against a whole cohort would only exasperate the enemy. Moreover, even in case of a legitimate defence I have counselled My disciples to suffer injuries patiently. Do not resist, I said to them. "If he strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other" (John v. 39). Moreover, even though you have the right and the power to resist, know, Peter, that I do not wish you to use this right and power. I accept freely the unjust attacks they make against Me. If I wished to escape them I could easily do so. Did I not escape from their hands on other occasions? Did I not a moment ago cast them down to the ground? Are not the angels with their terrible power at My service? But I do not wish to oppose My enemies; I freely undergo their persecutions, because, according to

the prophecies and in submission to the will of My Father, the redemption of the world must be thus accomplished. "The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it? How, then, shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?" Besides the literal sense which we have just explained, the words addressed to Peter contain a general lesson for all people. The Divine Master recalls to our minds the fifth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." Moreover, by the words, "Put up again thy sword into its place: the chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" the Saviour gives us a great lesson in patience and meekness.

He is attacked unjustly; He has every means of conquering His enemies, but He prefers to bear their insults, and returns them good for evil; teaching us by this to suffer patiently injuries and tribulations.

The trials and difficulties of life are numerous and varied. First, there are some sufferings for which we are our-

selves to blame; as for instance, sickness that comes from our own excesses. Second, there are other trials that come to us without our fault, in the natural course of things; as for instance, sickness and reverse of fortune. Third, others come from our neighbors, whose defects or even injuries we have to bear. We should accept in a Christian manner these different kinds of trials, saying in the first instance, "I have deserved it," and in the second, "God wills it." The third case presents a greater difficulty, when we desire to act according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Our wicked nature leads us to take vengeance, whereas Our Saviour forbids us to avenge ourselves. He teaches us meekness and the pardon of injuries. He tells us not to resist those who attack us, to suffer injury without complaining, to pray for our enemies, to render good for evil, and to act thus not only when we are powerless, but when we have the means of taking revenge.

Such is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and such also is His example. Here, then, are the motives: First, our trials come less from man than from God. It is a chalice which our Father gives us. Second, our patience will be meritorious and pleasing to God. Third, we are sinners, and we should always say: "I have deserved more!" Fourth, by pardoning our own brethren we can expect to obtain pardon and mercy from God. Fifth, it often happens that by our moderation, patience, gentleness, and returning good for evil we gain the good-will of our neighbor.

5th. Addressing the soldiers and officers who came to arrest Him, Jesus said: "Whom seek ye? They answered Him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith to them, I am He" (John xviii. 4, 5). This mere word made them fall to the ground. When He allowed them to arise He asked them again: "Whom seek ye?" And having received a second time the same answer, He said: "I have told you

that I am He: if, therefore, you seek Me, let these go their way" (Ibid. 8). These words contain the advice of a father and the order of a master.

The soldiers were ignorant and gross men, blind instruments of the hatred of the Jews. The Saviour endeavors to open their eyes to the crime they are about to commit. This is the reason He questions them, makes them feel His power, shows them His kindness in allowing them to arise, checks St. Peter, and heals miraculously the soldier who was wounded by the apostle. No matter how gross they are, they must know that this Jesus of Nazareth is not a criminal, not merely an inoffensive citizen, but a man of God. Their conscience then tells them that it is a crime to lay hands on Him.

Such is the instruction contained in the words addressed by Jesus to the soldiers. If they do not profit by it, they cannot say later on that they were not warned.

Does not Jesus warn sinners in like manner? He bids them take heed what they

are doing, to consider whom they attack and outrage when they commit sin: "It is I," He says, "your God and Supreme Benefactor, whom you offend." This word, "It is I," will be terrible for the sinner at the day of judgment, when, appearing in all His power, He will say: "He whom you despised in the person of the poor, of your brothers, of your superiors, my ministers, is no other than Jesus." On the contrary, how consoling for the just! He whom you have loved, fed, and served in the person of the poor, He whom you respected in the person of your parents, your priests, is none other than Myself. What greatness of soul in the language He adds: "If you seek Me, let these go their way." It is not only the kindness of a father who asks that his children should be spared: it is the authority of a master who demands that his servants who are to accomplish his designs should be respected. Jesus remains master of those whose prisoner He becomes.

6th. Finally, Jesus addresses the leaders of the band, that is to say, the chief priests and magistrates and ancients: "Are you come out as to a robber with swords and staves to apprehend Me? I was daily with you in the Temple teaching, and you did not lay hands on Me. But, that the Scriptures may be fulfilled. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Mark xiv. 49; Luke xxii. 52–55).

The men to whom He speaks, though instructed in Scripture, are badly disposed. They wish the death of Jesus; they came. to accomplish their criminal design, for a long time conceived and deliberately planned. In His mercy the Saviour addresses them words calculated to make them enter into themselves, or at least which would remove from them all excuse before God and men. This is why, under the form of a reproach, he makes them acknowledge in their hearts that they are persecuting an innocent man, and that their conduct towards Him is an abominable injustice: "You are not ignorant

that I am a peaceful man. You have seen Me frequently in the Temple teaching morality there. Why did you not arrest Me when you had every chance, if not that you recognized my innocence. You come to seize Me as a robber, as a public malefactor. If I were in reality such, you would have arrested Me in the Temple, in the midst of the people. But you feared the people, who were favorable to Me and would have defended Me. Now it is this which condemns you again, for the people would not defend a malefactor."

He then reminds them of the Scriptures. "It is necessary," says He, "that the Scriptures be fulfilled. By these words He shows them that they not only persecute an innocent man, but that they attack the Christ, the Anointed of the Lord. "Know," He says to them, "that in acting as you do toward Me, you fulfil the prophecies relating to Christ." Thus He made them clearly understand that they were attacking God.

But He adds, "Now is your hour, and

the power of darkness :" that is to say, at this moment all power is given to you over Me—to you, and the spirits of darkness whose instruments you are. These words, which answer a tacit objection of the Jews, should end by enlightening them. If you were the Christ, they might say, we would not have any power over you. Christ would be a powerful king. Doubtless, replies the Saviour, Christ will be a powerful King, who will judge the nations ; but Scripture says also that He is a Man of Sorrows, that He will have His hour of suffering and humiliation ; that God His Father will permit the powers of darkness to wreak their vengeance on Him for a time. These powers of darkness are the demons and the wicked men who are in league with them against the Lord and His anointed. Understand well, this is your hour ; but know that He will have His.

In all these words the Saviour betrays neither anger, nor fear, nor contempt, nor any personal view : He has no other

object than to convert His enemies and instruct the world. These words in particular, "this is your hour," contain a moral lesson for all men. All freedom is left to you, says He, during this transitory life: you can do the works of God or the works of darkness; but if you abuse your liberty to do evil, know that your life shall be like a fleeting hour; after which God will have His hour.

II. In the House of Caiphas.

THE high-priest Caiphas and his attendants assembled to judge the Saviour are men of accomplished villainy. Learned in the Scriptures, they could see that the shining life and miracles of Jesus were the accomplishment of the Scriptures, and that this Jesus, so admirable, although poor, was the Christ announced by the prophets. But being slaves to their wicked passions, they are wilfully blind; they persist in misunderstanding the divine mission of Jesus, and listening only to the promptings of hatred, they have resolved to take away His life. Their resolution is made, their minds are closed to the light, their hearts are steeled against pity and fear. In presence of this malicious assembly, which has sinned against the Holy Spirit, what will He do who is mercy incarnate, and who wishes not the death of a sinner, be he ever so

hardened. How will He speak? First, Jesus keeps silent, and He will not speak until He is obliged to speak, according to this rule of the Holy Ghost: "Where there is no hearing, pour not out words" (Ecclus. xxxii. 6). He will speak, however, but in deference to the authority of the magistrate. It is true that Caiphas is an unworthy magistrate, and openly abuses his power; but no matter how unworthy he may be, he is the legitimate magistrate, and Jesus respects authority in him.

He will respond, then, when He shall be interrogated by Caiphas, He will declare the truth openly, adding at the same time a short explanation to inspire, if possible, His judges with a salutary fear, and prevent them from falling into the abyss. The high-priest questions Him first on His doctrine, not to know it or to enlighten himself, but to find a pretext for condemning Christ. He wishes to make Him say that He is the Christ, the Saviour promised to the world, in order to make a

crime of this avowal. It is a trap which he sets for Jesus.

It is, moreover, a judicial irregularity. When a criminal is brought to trial, the witnesses should speak, and not the culprit. This is the reason why the Saviour replies: "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in the synagogue, and in the Temple, whither all the Jews resort; and in secret I have spoken nothing. Why asketh thou Me? ask them who have heard what I have spoken unto them: behold they know what things I have said" (John xviii. 20, 21). In other words, Jesus says to Caiphas: "If you believe My doctrine to be bad, and if you wish, as judge, to know it, you must not ask Me, but the witnesses who have heard Me. These witnesses are not wanting, since I have always taught in public."

This reply was true, just, and full of dignity. It contained neither disrespect nor insult to the high-priest. If the latter found it disagreeable, if he felt insulted, it was his own fault: it was he

himself who by his malicious questions forced Jesus to answer as He did. It is natural to suppose that Caiphas was quite angry: the truth displeases men because it exposes their knavery and malice.

An officer who was near Jesus, seeing how humiliating for Caiphas was the reply which he provoked, and wishing to curry favor with his master, dared to lift his hand and give a blow to the Son of God: "Answerest Thou the high-priest so?" This implied that Jesus was guilty of want of respect for authority. This accusation might have scandalized the weak. This is why the Saviour wished to refute it. For if He speaks at this moment, and if He does not let this insult pass in silence as He did on other occasions, it is not because He wishes to excuse or justify Himself: His answer is not inspired by any personal motive, but by the purest charity. It is calm, without bitterness, but dignified and triumphant. "If I have spoken evil," He says,

"give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou Me?" (John xviii. 23).

By these words He defies the brutal officer to prove his accusation, and in silencing him He makes him tacitly avow his own wrong, and convicts him of having struck an inoffensive accused, not to avenge authority, but to please his master at the expense of justice. Such is the meaning of the question: "If I have spoken well, why strikest thou Me?" In saying, "If I have spoken evil," in defying His enemies to produce a single insulting word that He uttered, the Divine Master shows us how we should govern our tongue: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (Jas. iii. 2).

While receiving with meekness the insult offered Him, the Saviour wished to reply to prevent the scandal of the weak, thus teaching us to avoid scandalizing our neighbor, and always to give good example.

Caiphas, however, wished to prove ju-

dicially that Jesus said He was the Christ. For this purpose he has recourse to false witnesses, but the testimony against the Saviour does not agree, and Jesus keeps silent.

Not succeeding in this matter, he goes right to the point, and addressing the Divine accused, says: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ, the Son of God?" Jesus saith to him: "Thou hast said it;" that is to say, Yes, I am. "Nevertheless I say to you, Hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 63, 64).

The appeal addressed to the Saviour is the greatest display of the authority of Caiphas as high-priest. In virtue of the power which he held from God, he commanded Jesus to explain Himself on a capital point of His doctrine, and to say before God, who would be His witness, if He was the Christ, the Saviour promised to the human race—that Christ who must

be the true Son of God. Jesus knew the wicked intentions of the high-priest. That unworthy pontiff abuses his authority: he interrogates the accused only to turn His answer against Him, and thus sentence Him to death. Jesus knows it; His answer will cost Him His life. But it matters not: it is the lawful authority which commands; He will obey without hesitation. Yes, He says, I am; I am He whom you say. and I openly declare before this same living God, whom you call to witness, that I am the Christ, the Saviour of the world, and true Son of God. These words of Jesus are a judicial declaration of His Divinity. Relying on the miracles performed by Him, and on the prophecies visibly fulfilled in His person, the declaration made by Jesus is absolutely true, and no objection can obscure it.

In spite of this evidence, Jesus saw that His judges, blinded by prejudice, despised Him on account of His apparent poverty. A man, they said to themselves

without honor, without power, cannot be the Christ, the Son of the God of Majesty; whom David describes as sitting at the right hand of the Most High, and whom Daniel represents as coming in the clouds of heaven, to rule the nations

Replying to these thoughts of their hearts, and wishing in His mercy to terrify them by a word which would shine as a light to their minds, He adds: "You do not wish to recognize Me as the Son of God; I am in your eyes only the Son of man, and you condemn Me as an impostor: remember, however, that this Son of man, whom you see poor and helpless before your tribunal, is the same who will sit at the right hand of God, and who will come in glory in the clouds of heaven, to judge the world."

These words, addressed to men who knew the Scriptures, and had seen the miracles performed by Jesus, must have fallen like a clap of thunder on their ears, and made them tremble. They were unmoved, however; and dared to assert

unanimously that the declaration of Jesus was a blasphemy, which merited death.

The solemn affirmation of His Divinity pronounced by Jesus Christ before the Jewish tribunal, was destined to enlighten the whole world. It teaches all men that Jesus is the true Son of God, showing Himself to us in a double state—in a state of humiliation, and in a state of glory. We must recognize Him in the one and in the other. Humiliated, poor, suffering, He is the Eternal Wisdom, teaching us to imitate Him. Coming in His glory to judge the world, He should inspire us with a salutary fear.

The condemnation of the Saviour took place during the night, in the presence of the members of the great Council. The following morning the Sanhedrim assembled, and made Jesus repeat the judicial declaration He had previously made. Summoning Him before their tribunal, they asked Him. "If Thou be the Christ, tell us."

"If I shall tell you," answered Jesus "you will not believe Me; and if I also

ask you, you will not answer Me" (Luke xxii. 66–68).

By thus unveiling their secret thoughts Jesus gives them a new proof of His Divinity. He reminds them at the same time of the judgments of God, in order to fill them with a holy fear. It is a last grace of His mercy; a grace which they will abuse, as they have so many others, because they have wilfully closed their eyes to the truth.

These words, "If I shall tell you, you will not believe Me," reveal the bad disposition of sinners. The Holy Spirit, speaking of these unhappy souls, says that they do not wish to understand, lest they be obliged to do good. We know that those wilfully blind, who reject all instruction, and whose salvation thus becomes impossible, are very common in our day. Let us take care not to be of their number. Let us endeavor to know our religion; let us be docile to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Church. The more we know the holy law of God, the more easily we can observe it.

III. Before Pilate.

PILATE, the Roman Governor of Judea is a pagan, who has not the wickedness of the Jews, the enemies of the Saviour. He did not wish to do wrong through malice; but he will commit it through weakness, because he does not possess the fear of God, and does not put his conscience, his duty, above everything else.

He is a man of the world—one of those whose object in life is their own interest and ambition, an honorable position and popularity. For him justice and honesty before God are secondary matters. A man of this stamp, being neither blinded nor hardened, is more open to the workings of divine grace; but his temporal interests hinder him from following its inspirations, and urge him on to the most enormous crimes.

The Saviour will speak to Pilate in a

manner suitable to the dispositions of the magistrate. First, He answers by a silence full of wisdom; then He explains to him His kingdom, which is not of this world, and His Divine mission among men; and thirdly, He tells him how He Jesus, in spite of His divine mission, is submissive to his power.

1st. Silence.—As the Jews demanded of Pilate the crucifixion of Jesus, who had been condemned to death by their tribunal, this magistrate, who knew Jesus only by the most favorable reports, asked them what crime He had committed. They should have answered that He said He was Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour promised and announced by the prophets. Such, in fact, was the reason of the condemnation pronounced against Him. But to accuse Jesus of calling Himself the Messias promised by the Scriptures would not gain their end. The pagan magistrate would not have understood this; he would not have seen any crime in this. They change the base

of their accusation, and accuse Him of other crimes: We have found this man, they said, exciting the people, forbidding to pay tribute to Cæsar, and trying to make Himself the Christ, and to usurp as such the title of king. They substituted for the crime of blasphemy a political crime, and Jesus became a State criminal, a rebel against Rome. In reality the pretended crimes charged against Him were mere vague accusations and falsehoods about the conduct of Jesus, who was known for three years in public. Pilate understood all this at first, and he felt that Jesus, whose wisdom and eloquence he could not ignore, had only to speak to confound His accusers. Jesus had merely to say: Where are your witnesses? Let them state when, where, and how I have done those things imputed to Me. But Jesus did not answer.

"Dost Thou not hear," Pilate then said to Him, "how great testimonies they allege against Thee?" Jesus remained silent, and, regardless of the words of

Pilate and the calumnies of the Jews, He did not say a word.

The governor was astonished, and appeared greatly disturbed. That mysterious silence was in fact a just reproach, addressed both to the Jews and to Pilate: to the Jews, who were conscious of their calumnies; and to Pilate, who must know that as judge he was bound to demand proof of these accusations. The first answer to Pilate was a silence full of dignity and gentleness, which made the pagan magistrate feel the innocence of Jesus, and his own duty as judge. Pilate then thinks of introducing Jesus into the pretorium and questioning Him in detail.

2d. Of the three principal accusations which the Jews chose as most likely to make an impression on the Roman governor, the last, which concerned royalty, appeared to Pilate to deserve attention. This is the reason why he took Jesus aside and asked Him: "Art Thou the king of the Jews?"

This question could have two mean

ings, according as it was generally understood or according to the religious ideas of the Jews. In the ordinary meaning, which the pagans understood, the king of the Jews was a temporal king, who, it was supposed, wished to free Judea from the Roman rule, and re-establish the throne of David. In the religious sense He was the promised Messias, the Saviour of the world, called King also by the prophets, but King by excellence, King of justice and sanctity.

What meaning did Pilate attach to the words "King of the Jews?" He knew that Jesus, a poor, simple, and peaceful man, had never thought of fomenting a rebellion; that He had no other army than a few disciples, as poor and inoffensive as Himself. He could not therefore seriously believe that Jesus intended to start a revolution. But knowing, on the other hand, that the Jews expected a mysterious king whom they called the Christ,—this was the crime of Jesus,—he tried to discover something that might compromise

or convict the Saviour. This is why, though not understanding well the meaning of the question, he asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews.

The merciful Saviour, in order to aid the pagan governor to grasp the sublime notion of the Messias, asked him if that question came from himself, or if the Jews had suggested it to him.

"Sayest thou this thing of thyself," He answered, "or have others told it thee of Me?"

"Am I a Jew," replied Pilate, that I should busy myself about the Messias? It is not my business to decide religious questions: there is question of a crime of which Thou art accused. "Thy own nation and the chief-priests have delivered Thee up to me: what hast Thou done?" Then Jesus, replying to the first question of Pilate, said: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom

is not from hence" (John xviii. 36). That is to say, My royalty is not an earthly royalty, and I am a king altogether different from the kings of the earth. This should be very evident, since I have no army to defend Myself against the Jews. I am, then, not a king of this world. In insisting on the exceptional character of His royalty, they feel that Jesus wishes to provoke a further question.

"Art thou a king, then?" rejoined Pilate. This was implicitly to ask what was this unearthly royalty The Saviour did not hesitate to answer this salutary question. Jesus said: "Thou sayest that I am a king. For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." In other words, I am the King of the just and of the saints; all those who wish to live in the true religion, and practise the justice and holiness and virtues which it teaches, will form My kingdom. I am not of the earth, like

other men who have an earthly origin, I came from elsewhere, since I am not born for this world. Besides, if I have come here upon earth, becoming man, it was only to teach men the truth, the true religion. Whoever loves the truth hears My voice, receives My laws, and follows Me as his king.

By these words the Saviour explains to Pilate His divine mission in the world, as far as that pagan was able to understand it. Pilate begins to see the truth, and he would soon be fully enlightened if he continued to listen to the Divine Master. Unfortunately, he was not one of those who love the truth, and seek it with all their heart. Truth, for him, is only secondary: his great object is his own personal interest. He then asked the Saviour an excellent question. "What is truth?" he inquired. He touched the capital point, and no doubt the Saviour's reply would have been decisive to enlighten him. But he did not await the reply, and went out immediately. Why,

when he asked the question, did he not await an answer, which Jesus would have in a moment given him? Because he was not very anxious to be instructed. What he desired was to settle the case of Jesus, and end it without displeasing the Jews too much. Moreover, recognizing that the royalty of Jesus was not a crime, he could declare it juridically, and thus bring the trial to an end.

He went out to inform the Jews of the result of his interrogations, and told them that he found no reason for His condemnation: "I find no cause in Him." The whole reply made to Pilate by Jesus touching His royalty may be summed up in a threefold statement: 1st, I am a King; 2d, but My kingdom differs from the kingdoms of this world; 3d, it is a royalty of truth and justice. These words, which reveal to us the true character of the royalty of Jesus Christ, are full of instruction for all mankind.

1st. Jesus Christ is a King. He is King as God, and He is King as the Man-

God. In virtue of His Divinity, He is the immortal King of ages. In virtue of His humanity, and as Man-God, He is King of the human race, true and incomparable King, whom we are bound to love and serve.

Now to know Him we must consider Him: First, exteriorly and interiorly. To consider Him exteriorly is to regard Him in a purely human way, such as He appears in history, and such as most of His contemporaries regarded Him. To consider Him interiorly is to see Him with the eyes of faith, such as the divine Word manifests Him to us, as the Holy Virgin and other privileged persons saw Him.

Second. To know the Christ-King we must view Him in His double state of humiliation and glory. He is in humiliation during His mortal life and in His eucharistic life; He is in glory at His resurrection, His ascension, and in heaven at the right hand of God the Father; He will manifest His glory to the whole

world at His coming at the end of the world.

Third. To know the Christ-King we must consider Him as present with His people. "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." He is present with us physically in every place, in virtue of His Divinity; He is also with us in virtue of His humanity, but only in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. He is present with us morally in His Church, in the person of His ministers. He is present with us spiritually, by charity in the poor, in all the members of Holy Church, which is His mystical body.

2d. His kingdom differs totally from the kingdoms of this world. The latter have for their object temporal good: the kingdom of Jesus Christ has for its object eternal and imperishable goods. The kings of this world are all mortal: Christ is the immortal King of ages. Earthly kings force obedience: Christ has only willing subjects, who serve Him through love. Earthly kings demand much, im-

pose tributes of money and blood: they give little, and only to a few, and those oftentimes undeserving. Jesus Christ places on His followers a sweet and gentle yoke, gives much, gives to every one according to his merit.

3d. He is the King of truth. What is this truth? How is He the King of truth? Truth is the true knowledge of God, justice according to the law of God. This is true happiness and life eternal. He is King of truth because He teaches His people; and because His people are of those who love truth. "Every one that is of the truth hears My voice" (John xviii. 37). Finally, He is the King of truth, because He will one day make the truth shine in the eyes of all.

Pilate, then, in his capacity as judge, had pronounced sentence, and declared that the pretended royalty of Jesus Christ did not constitute a crime, that the accused was innocent.

Jesus was acquitted by the President of Rome, and the latter, considering the

case settled, thought the Jews would cease their efforts. We know that he was mistaken, and that the Jews did not accept the sentence. After the Roman judge had acquitted the accused they persisted in declaring Him a criminal, and demanded His condemnation.

In presence of this conduct, how did Pilate act? Alas! he was weak enough to yield to the demands of the accusers. Instead of maintaining by his authority his declaration of Jesus' innocence, instead of listening to his conscience and doing his duty, he listened to his own interest; he yielded to fear and human respect. Instead of drawing the sword against the insolent persecutors of a just Man, he trembled, he bowed before them, he used the meanest expedients, supplications even, to obtain from the Jews the permission not to crucify Jesus; and, after thus dishonoring himself, he goes further still, and even signs the death-warrant.

Before going thus far, however, he

questions Jesus a second time. As the Jews demanded the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, he leaves the matter to themselves, "for I," he added, "find no cause in Him." "We have a law," the Jews replied, "and according to the law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God" (John xix. 7). The true motive for His condemnation was that He made Himself the Son of God.

This language threw Pilate into alarm and great perplexity. He calls Himself the Son of God! Might He not be really so? Have the Jews given me any proofs to the contrary? They have shown their hatred by odious accusations; whereas Jesus has conducted Himself in an admirable manner: His dignity in the midst of sufferings, His wisdom, the prodigies they tell of Him, manifest His superiority. What mystery is concealed in the person of this just Man! Did He not give me to understand that He existed before this world, and that He had an object in coming into this

world, namely, to give testimony of the truth. Woe is me! A God is concealed under the form of an innocent Man, whom I am asked to condemn.

Fearing to have anything to do with a divinity under human form, and all the more alarmed because he had Jesus scourged, Pilate felt the need of enlightening himself on such an important matter. He called Jesus, who came to him crowned with thorns. At the sight of so much cruelty, and seeing the Saviour so meek and patient, he was filled with the greatest reverence for Him. "Whence art Thou?" he asked Him timidly. This question did not refer to His birth-place. Pilate knew He was a Galilean, but it referred to His personal origin. Art Thou simply human, as other mortals; or art Thou divine, since Thou callest Thyself the Son of God? Such is the meaning of the question, "Whence art Thou?"

What answer will the Saviour make? He is at once both the human and the

divine—the Son of God and the Son of man. Will He say to Pilate that He is true man—Son of man? The governor will not understand then how He can be the Son of God.

Will He say that He is God from all eternity, equal to His Father, and all-powerful like Him? Pilate will not understand how the all-powerful is in the power of men. Will He, in fine, say that He is both the Son of God and the Son of man? He will be still less understood. "Speakest Thou not to me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee?" Certain critics think that Pilate was insulted at the silence of Jesus, and said in anger: "Speakest Thou not to me?" This is a mistake. This silence in a man so patient, so gentle, so superior, had nothing offensive for the magistrate; but it increased his fears. He suspected more and more that this accused Man, so full of noble qualities, is possessed of a terrible power which He holds back.

but which He will soon exercise upon His enemies. This is why he urges Jesus to speak, and to speak of His power.

"Speakest Thou not to me?" he says to Him. "Dost Thou not know that I have all power over Thee?" This was equivalent to asking Jesus indirectly if He possessed a power superior to his own. Jesus answers in the affirmative, "and from thenceforth," says the Scripture, "Pilate sought to release Him" (John xix. 12).

Now, in what words did Jesus make His answer? "Thou shouldst not have any power against Me unless it were given thee from above. Therefore He that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin." You have not, He says, any power over Me, though you are clothed with public authority. I am altogether above your power and beyond your jurisdiction. If, however, I happen to be in your power it is the effect of a special Providence of God, to which I cheerfully submit, and which has per-

mitted Me to be given up to the Jews. They know that I am the Son of God, although they say that I only pretend to be such. It is because they know Me sufficiently that they commit a greater crime than you do. For, though your sin is less grave, because you know Me less, you commit a great sin in condemning an innocent Man. Know, then, that if God at present gives you power over Me you will have to render an account of the abuse of this power. The answer of the Saviour, which we have just explained, can be briefly expressed as follows: I am absolutely superior to you and to your jurisdiction; but God at this moment gives to you and to the Jews an exceptional power over Me. The Jews and you abuse this power to treat Me unjustly; you commit a crime against Me: the crime of the Jews is greater than yours, because they know better than you do My divine dignity. An answer so magnificent and so calm in the mouth of this just Man crowned

with thorns must have terrified Pilate. Though it was not fully understood, it gave him a great warning, and filled his mind with light. He not only saw in Jesus a man eminently good and respectable, but he got a glimpse of His divine character.

He makes a last effort to save Him. These painful efforts, however, are to no purpose. His duty commanded him to free Jesus; instead of miserable expedients, he should have taken a decisive, stand. Pilate had the power: he had merely to use it, and Jesus would have been set at liberty. Unfortunately he had not the courage of his convictions, because he did not act according to duty. He did not put his duty above everything and human respect made him act against his conscience. "If thou release this Man thou art not Cæsar's friend" (John xix. 11). This word triumphed, and Pilate signed the death-warrant of the Son of God.

A terrible lesson for the slaves of

human respect, and for lax Christians who place their interest, their position, and their advancement in the world above their conscience.

The last words of Jesus Christ: "He that hath delivered Me up to thee hath the greater sin"—these words, I say, contain a lesson for all men. The Saviour teaches us that there are some sins greater than others and which deserve greater punishment. What are the circumstances which aggravate sin? They are ingratitude, malice, sacrilege, and scandal.

Every sin is an ingratitude, but the ingratitude is blacker in the Christian, who has received greater benefits from God.

Every sin supposes malice and bad will, but this malice is greater when we know the law of God as Christians do. Every sin is an abuse of the gifts of God, of His graces; but this abuse in the Christian is a sacrilege, especially when he abuses the sacraments.

Every sin is a wound made on the soul of him who commits it, but the evil is greater still when we wound at the same time our neighbor's soul. This happens when scandal is given.

IV. The Journey to Calvary.

Words of Jesus to the Women of Jerusalem.

When, bearing His cross, covered with wounds, crowned with thorns, His face besmeared with blood, and the populace heaping insults on Him, Jesus began His journey towards Calvary, a crowd of women, moved with compassion, began to weep over Him. The Son of God deigned to stop, and turning towards the women thus addressed them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For behold the days shall come wherein they will say: Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us, and to the

hills: Cover us. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke xxiii. 28.)

The Divine Master says to them: I who suffer am less to be pitied than the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who have made Me suffer: they will receive chastisements more terrible than death. For if I, who am innocence itself, must undergo such a death, what will be the lot of the guilty? "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me." Your tears, of course, do not displease me, as My words to you prove: your tears are just and holy, but I need pity less than those who crucify Me. Doubtless you see Me in a sorrowful state; nevertheless I am happy to suffer, because My sufferings are holy in themselves, precious for the world, and only transitory, to be followed by eternal glory. My sufferings are holy, because I bear them patiently, without having deserved them." To accept with humility a punishment when one is guilty, is something pleasing to God; but to suffer

an unjust persecution is more meritorious. This is why I have said: "Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice' sake."

My sufferings are precious for the world, because they accomplish the great work of Redemption; they expiate sin, repair the outrages offered to God, become a seed of justice for earth and of glory for heaven. From My blood will spring up innumerable souls who will praise the mercy of God for all eternity.

My sufferings are only passing. If they would last for ages I would regard them as short and of slight account, because even an age is nothing compared with eternity.

My sufferings will be followed by an eternity of glory. And this glory will not be My personal advantage, but in virtue of My Passion, all My disciples who unite their sufferings to Mine will share in My glory for all eternity. I do not, then, need sympathy in My sorrows. The people of Jerusalem who are to

crucify Me need your pity. It is over them you should weep, because they commit an enormous crime, which will receive a terrible punishment. Their crime is a Deicide. I am the true Son of God: though having the appearance of man I am not the less a divine person; it is the majesty of God they outrage in Me. It is true that all do not know the mystery of My divinity: but some are in wilful ignorance; others know at least that I am a just and innocent Man. Jerusalem commits a crime which will draw down the vengeance of God. That guilty city will be destroyed by Roman armies, and its inhabitants will perish of hunger and famine. That famine will be so terrible, that mothers will even devour their children. Weep, then, over Jerusalem, because her misfortune is very great.

In saying, "The days shall come when they will say, Blessed are the wombs that have not borne," Jesus alludes to the terrible catastrophe which will soon fall on the Deicide city. He presents to

these unfortunate mothers and to all the Jews a fearful tableau of the calamities that will follow the Roman invasion.

Besides the literal sense which we have just explained, there is a spiritual sense which may be applied to every man. In the person of these pious women of Jerusalem He addresses all pious souls, all the faithful inhabitants of that holy city, the Church, and says to them: O Blessed souls who meditate on my Passion, weep less for My sufferings than for those who are the cause of them—that is, yourselves and all sinners. Sinners are those who crucify Me again by their sins: "crucifying again to themselves the Son of God" (Heb. vi. 6). Sinners commit a crime, and must expect a fearful punishment from the hands of the living God. This punishment will be terrible. "For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"

The green wood is Jesus, the just, the Holy One by excellence, who, like a tree

full of sap and fruitfulness, produces the fruits of every virtue. A tree of this kind is not destined to be cut down. The dry wood refers to those sinners who call down the vengeance of God, as the dead trees call the woodman to cut them down and use them for fuel. If sin is thus punished in the person of the Son of God, how, alas! will it be punished in the sinner? For having taken on Himself merely the appearance of sin, the Just One, the Holy of Holies, is condemned to an infamous death. What, then, will be the condemnation of sinners who have provoked the anger of God by their iniquities? The comparison tells us. They will be burned like the dry wood; they will suffer in that prison "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished" (Mark ix. 43).

These words of the Son of God should make those who are in mortal sin tremble. They must choose between penance and hell. Ah! is it not better to do penance and throw ourselves into the

arms of the Divine Mercy? If the Saviour here reminds us of the punishment of hell, He does not exclude that of purgatory.

On good and healthy trees we often see some dried and withered branches mingled with the green ones; the latter are fit only for burning. In pious souls who practise virtue are found venial faults, stains, little debts against divine justice. This is dry wood for purgatory. "Weep then for yourselves and for your children," that is to say, for your sins and for those of all sinners. Weep and do penance, because without the tears of a true repentance you cannot escape the fearful chastisements which await you. Then vainly will you call on death as a merciful liberator. "Mountains," you will say, "fall on us; hills, cover us." You refuse to listen to the mercy of God now, and you will hear those terrible words: "Depart, ye accursed, into everlasting fire." Weep, then, while there is

time to prevent this misfortune. The tears of penance are a salutary remedy. "Turn ye from your evil ways," says the Lord, "and why will you die?" (Ezech. xxxiii. 11.)

V. Silence of Jesus in the Court of Herod.

THE Son of God during His Passion came in contact with different kinds of persons. There were His disciples, men of good-will, but weak; there was Judas, blinded by a passion and hardened by the abuse of great graces; there was Caiphas and his courtiers, wicked, wilfully blind, and sinning against the Holy Ghost; there was Pilate, an honest pagan, who wished to be just but had not the courage; there were the women of Jerusalem, pious souls, but whose piety should be more solid; finally, there were Herod and his court, worldly men, given over to a life of pleasure. The Saviour deigned to speak to all except the last.

Herod, king of Galilee, before whom Jesus appeared during His Passion, was Herod Antipas, son of the other Herod who ordered the slaughter of the inno-

cents of Bethlehem. Having inherited the vices of his father, he abandoned himself to a life of shameless impurity, living in open adultery, and sullied with the blood of John the Baptist. This wretched voluptuary, thinking of nothing but pleasure, wanted to find in Jesus a subject for amusement. For a long time he had a great desire to see Him and talk with Him about the wonders He performed in Judea. The publican Zacheus also wished to see Jesus and examine His countenance, because he believed Him a man of God, and was filled with respect for Him. This holy and laudable desire merited the touching words which Jesus addressed to him.

Such was not Herod's desire. "He was desirous of a long time to see Him," says the Gospel, "because he had heard many things of Him, and he hoped to see some sign wrought by Him" (Luke xxiii. 8). In other words, he imagined that Jesus would amuse him like a jester or an actor.

He received Jesus with kindness, surrounded by his whole court, and was eager to address Him, to express the pleasure he felt to see and know Him. But Jesus did not notice these advances. He remained silent.

Herod first imagines that it is through modesty and fear, and he begins to encourage Him and promise Him liberty. He repeats his questions, but not a word does he receive in reply. This was certainly a prodigy that Herod and his court did not expect. What will he do? He does what worldly men generally do to satisfy their caprice—he despises Him, and makes Him an object of mockery. "And Herod, with his army," says the Gospel, "set Him at naught: and mocked Him, putting on Him a white garment, and sent Him back to Pilate" (Luke xxiii. 11).

The conduct of the Son of God and His complete silence before Herod contains a mystery which we should endeavor to penetrate. Why did Jesus

refuse to speak? It was because Herod represented the world, with which Jesus had nothing in common. "What fellowship hath light with darkness?" (II. Cor. vi. 14.) The court of Herod represented the world, which cannot receive the Spirit of truth, nor His grace. "It seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him" (John xiv. 17).

Now Jesus always speaks to communicate some grace of the Holy Ghost, and lift the soul to higher things.

Jesus, who is charity and mercy, would have spoken to Herod as He did to Pilate, if He felt that He would be understood by this worldly prince; but this man was absolutely incapable of understanding, because, according to the expression of the apostle, he was "a sensual man, who perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand" (I. Cor. ii. 14). Worldly men have no relish for the words of Christ; hence He does not speak to them, according to this divine rule: "Where there is no hear-

ing, pour not out words" (Ecclus. xxxii. 6).

Such is the sad condition of worldlings. They are inaccessible to grace, and consequently they cannot save themselves. Who are the worldlings of whom we speak? They are those who lead a life of pleasure, a life of wealth and ambition; men who allow themselves to be tied down to earthly things, who seek only wealth, and who never think of God or of their eternal interests. It is this class of people to whom Jesus does not speak, because, like animals, they would not understand. If they wish to be saved, let them leave the Babylon of a wicked world: "Come forth from Babylon and flee from the Chaldeans" (Isaias viii. 26).

VI. Words Spoken on the Cross.

In the seven words which the Saviour spoke on the cross He reveals to us the inmost sentiments of His heart, and the mysteries contained in this divine heart—mysteries of suffering, of love and zeal for souls, of confidence and abandonment to the will of God. These last words present the final teachings of our Master, His most sublime examples, and the most powerful motives to love Him. They have been admirably commented on by the pious Cardinal Bellarmine (Bellarm., "De Septem verbis"). We will content ourselves with giving an explanation—brief though it be—of the practical lessons contained in the Saviour's last words:

First Word.

When they reached the place called Calvary, says St. Luke, they crucified

Him. Jesus said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 43). This first word is a prayer. Under what circumstances does He pray? How does He pray? What examples does He give us to imitate Him in thus praying.

It is in the midst of the most excruciating torments that Jesus prays. He does not curse His enemies, He is not angry, He does not complain; He prays. He prays for those who crucify Him—that is, first of all, for the Jews and His executioners; secondly, for sinners—for us all who are the moral cause of His death by our sins. For as the apostle teaches, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I. Cor. xv. 3). How the goodness and charity of His heart are revealed in this prayer!

He prays for His enemies by excusing them as far as He can. Alas! He seems to say, their crime is great; it is I, the Son of God, whom they put to death; but they do not know it. In speaking thus

the Saviour supposes them guilty, since He asks pardon for them; but He presents the extenuating circumstance of their ignorance, which to a certain extent always accompanies sin. Doubtless sinners know sufficiently, or they should know, what they are doing; but some are less instructed, less guilty than others, and it can be said of all that they do not know to its full extent the outrage they commit against God or the evil they do to themselves. "They know not what they do."

What an example for the world! An example of meekness and patience and forgiveness of injuries; an example of charity for our neighbor, which goes so far as to excuse the interior dispositions of those whose outward actions are culpable; even praying for His executioners while they are wreaking their vengeance on Him.

SECOND WORD.

One of the robbers, touched by the superhuman charity of Jesus, recognized

in Him the heavenly royalty for which He was crucified, saw His Divinity, and believed in the kingdom of heaven which He preached. At the same time this poor sinner, confessing humbly his sins, and accepting death for his crimes, addressed to Jesus this prayer: "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom" (Luke xxiii. 42). Jesus answers immediately: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise" (Ibid.). Here is a word of mercy: Jesus hears a prayer and grants a favor. What grace does He give? Who is He who grants it? to whom does He grant it? and what lesson does He teach us in granting it?

Jesus grants to a sinner the complete pardon of his sins, and promises him an immediate entrance into paradise, where he will enjoy with Him the delights of eternal life. What goodness! what liberality! What earthly king ever granted like favors!

Who is He who gives such a reward? It is a man stripped of everything, who

possesses nothing on earth, and who is about to die; but that dying man is God.

To whom does He extend this mercy? To a great sinner, who has passed his life in crime; but this sinner believes, he has confidence, he repents of his sins and humbly confesses them, he looks at Jesus Christ crucified, and he prays.

What lesson is here given to us? A great lesson of confidence in the Divine mercy. Every sinner, no matter how bad his life may have been, can obtain pardon even at the hour of death; no one should despair. However, he will be rash to defer his conversion and refuse grace when it is offered to him. If the good robber was converted at death, it is not said that he had already the occasion and grace of conversion. Moreover, at his side—at the side of Jesus Christ Himself—we see another blind and hardened sinner dying impenitent. The Word of God and a bitter experience, alas! show us that impenitence is the usual lot of those who defer their conversion.

Third Word.

Jesus on the cross forgets His own sorrows to think of His holy mother and of us. Seeing that blessed mother at the foot of the Cross, seeing also the beloved disciple St. John, He says to His mother: "Woman, behold thy son;" then He says to the disciple: "Behold thy mother" (John xix. 26, 27). In pronouncing these words Jesus gives us a great example, He confers on us a great benefit, He imposes on us a great and sweet duty.

He gives us an example of filial piety. To show us with what religious care we should observe the fourth commandment, which He placed at the head of the second table of His law, He wishes, from the top of the cross, at the most solemn moment of His life, to give us an example of love and respect for our parents. His holy mother, already in her declining years, is going to lose a Son who would be her consolation and the staff of her old age; this Son, in the midst of

His torments, is concerned about His mother; He provides for her in giving her another son in the person of St. John. It is thus that He teaches us to honor and assist our parents.

He confers an immense favor on us in giving us His mother for our mother, the holy, sweet, merciful Virgin Mary. The words, "Behold thy mother!" are addressed to each of us whom Jesus sees in the person of St. John; they mean: This blessed woman who is My mother is from this moment your mother. In virtue of that Divine word a wonderful change took place in the heart of Mary: that heart became for each one of us a mother's heart. She is, then, mine; she is my mother; and as such she knows me, she loves me, she wishes to procure for me the double blessings which must insure the happiness of a child—the blessing of a good education, and that of a happy state of life. The education which Mary wishes to give her children is a Christian formation, which will ren-

der us like unto Jesus Christ; the state of life to which she wishes to conduct us is an eternal beatitude.

Jesus in giving us such a mother imposes on us a great and agreeable duty—that of filial piety towards Mary. In saying, "Behold thy son!" He clearly indicates that He wishes a return on our part, and that if Mary is our mother we should honor her as such, we should be her true children, after the example of Him whose brothers we became. O God! what respect, what love, what confidence, Jesus had for His holy mother! What will I do to correspond with the designs of my Saviour in the matter of filial devotion towards Mary?

Fourth Word.

That Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst" (John xix. 28), and the soldiers gave Him vinegar and gall. Why did Jesus make known that He suffered thirst? And how should we satisfy the thirst of Jesus?

If He made known His thirst, it was not to obtain a mere bodily relief, but to instruct us. It was necessary for us to know not only the corporal thirst which He suffered for us, but still more the ardent thirst of His adorable heart. Jesus wished to endure corporal thirst to expiate our intemperance. In saying, "I thirst," He revealed to us the thirst of His heart, that is, His burning desire for our sanctification and salvation. Sinners, Jesus thirsts for your conversion; lukewarm souls, He thirsts for your return to a fervent life; just ones, He thirsts for your advancement in virtue, for your prayers, for your love, and for your good works. Such is the thirst of His heart: He reveals it to us that we may hasten to assuage it.

How can we assuage the thirst of the Saviour? Must we not satisfy the ardent longings of His heart? Alas! there are those who only offer Him vinegar,—sinners who refuse to be converted. There are, fortunately, those who give

Him to drink what He desires: they are the just ones who offer Him the living water of humility, the wine of divine love, which recoils at no sacrifice, however great.

FIFTH WORD.

Darkness spread over the earth from the sixth till the ninth hour, and towards the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice: "Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani? My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" These words are a prayer, a revelation, and an example.

In saying: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Jesus repeated the prayer of His prophet. "My God, my God, look upon me; depart not from me, for tribulation is very near: for there is none to help me" (Ps. xxi.). These words signify: O God, who art always My God! though Thou appearest to have abandoned Me to My enemies, ah! look upon My sufferings, My humiliations, and do not delay to come to My assistance. Such is the meaning of the prayer of the Saviour.

It shows us how the Divine Master, plunged in the dark abyss of suffering, lifts His eyes to heaven with humble confidence, and how we in the midst of our trials and sorrows should not be discouraged, but always have confidence in God.

In saying "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the Saviour reveals the mystery of interior abandonment which He endured on the cross.

Though forsaken by men, He finds Himself forsaken even by His Father, who regards Him as a sinner, because He has taken on Himself our sins. He wishes to suffer this cruel abandonment, to expiate the sins by which we have abandoned our Creator, our God, our sovereign Good. "My people," says the prophet, "have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water" (Jerem. ii. 13).

Sixth Word.

The soldiers, says St. John, presented Him a sponge filled with vinegar and gall. When Jesus had tasted it, He said:

"It is consummated," (John xix. 30). This word, which Jesus spoke at the last moment of His mortal life, is pronounced after Him by all His disciples; sinners also pronounce it, but in another sense.

In the mouth of Jesus, this word, "It is consummated," has the fullest meaning. He had already said it in the supper-room, when He exclaimed: "I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. My mission is finished on the earth; it remains for Me to return to heaven." How beautiful to be able to speak thus! This happiness will be the portion of all true Christians who follow the footsteps of their Divine Master, thinking only of fulfilling their mission on earth, no matter how painful it may be. A day will come when their labors will be over, and they can say with Jesus: "Father, I have finished the work which Thou hast given Me to do" (John xvii. 4). "It is consummated."

The bad Christian, the sinner, will arrive at the end of his career. He has

not fulfilled his mission, he sought only the things of this world, and while seeking them he worked for his own damnation. Earthly things fly from him now, all his pleasures are over, but the work of his damnation remains; his loss is eternal. All is over! Ah! how much better to follow Jesus Christ, and labor for our salvation!

Seventh Word.

At the ninth hour Jesus uttered a great cry, saying: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46). Then He expired. This last word of the Saviour shows us what has been in the eyes of God the death of our Master: it teaches us at the same time what will be the death of His true disciples, and how different will be that of sinners.

The death of Jesus, so sad, so ignominious in the eyes of the world, is infinitely precious in the eyes of God, since it delivered Him from all His sufferings, and brought Him into the embrace of

His eternal Father. "My Father," He says, "into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Thou art My Father and I am Thy worthy Son. My soul, which Thou hast created for Thyself, I have sacrificed to Thy love and service; I have adorned it with all virtues, and made it dear to Thy heart. Here is this soul, such as Thou wished it to be; I place it in Thy hands, open to receive it, and ready to crown it with glory and honor. Such is the meaning of these words: "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit." They breathe the confidence and happiness of a just man; they show how precious is the death of our Master.

The death of His true disciples will be equally so. Of them it is written: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. cxv. 15). Are there not children of God living only to do the will of their Father? Have they not preserved their souls free from the contagion of evil? Have they not sanctified themselves by faith, by confidence,

by charity, and made themselves pleasing to the eternal Father? Does not this Father, full of love for them, open His arms to receive them and place a crown of glory on their heads? They can say in all confidence with Jesus, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

The death of sinners, alas! will be far different. Of them it is written: "The death of the wicked is very evil" (Ps. xxxiii. 22). Have they lived as children of God? Can they call God their Father? And what have they done with their souls? Those souls, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, they have given over to the demon. No, it is not to God they can give themselves, but to the Prince of Darkness. How much better to return to God, ask pardon of our sins by the merits of Jesus Christ, and lead a Christian life! By uniting ourselves to Jesus and carrying His cross with Him we can approach death cheerfully, and say with Him in all confidence: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

O Virgin Mary, Mother of my Jesus, thou wert near the cross when thy Divine Son pronounced those dying words: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." They were engraven on thy heart, and doubtless thou didst pronounce them at the moment of thy happy death. O most sweet and amiable mother! when the moment of my death arrives deign to be near me, thy unworthy child, to enable me to say with confidence in Jesus and in thee: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

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